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OFFICE OF NAVAL RESEARCH  
Contract N00014-75-C-0970  
Task No. NR 056-596

TECHNICAL REPORT NO. 3

On the Dissociation and Reactivity of Hydrogen  
at Low-Coordination Transition-Metal Sites

by

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Prepared for publication in Physical Review Letters

January 11, 1977

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		READ INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE COMPLETING FORM
1. REPORT NUMBER 14 TR-3 ✓	2. GOVT ACCESSION NO.	3. RECIPIENT'S CATALOG NUMBER
4. TITLE (and Subtitle) 6 ON THE DISSOCIATION AND REACTIVITY OF HYDROGEN AT LOW-COORDINATION TRANSITION-METAL SITES.		5. TYPE OF REPORT & PERIOD COVERED 9 Interim rept.
7. AUTHOR(s) 10 K. H. Johnson and A. Balazs		6. PERFORMING ORG. REPORT NUMBER
8. CONTRACT OR GRANT NUMBER(s) 15 N00014-75-C-0970 ✓		
9. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS Department of Materials Science and Engineering Massachusetts Institute of Technology Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139		10. PROGRAM ELEMENT, PROJECT, TASK AREA & WORK UNIT NUMBERS Task No. NR 056-596
11. CONTROLLING OFFICE NAME AND ADDRESS Office of Naval Research Department of the Navy Arlington, Virginia 22217		12. REPORT DATE 11/11 January 11, 1977
14. MONITORING AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS (if different from Controlling Office) 12 14 p.		13. NUMBER OF PAGES
		15. SECURITY CLASS. (of this report) Unclassified
		15a. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE
16. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of this Report) Approved for public release; distribution unlimited.		
17. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of the abstract entered in Block 20, if different from Report)		
18. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES		
19. KEY WORDS (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) dissociation; reactivity; hydrogen; transition-metal complexes; platinum; iridium; orbital electronegativity; low-coordination sites; transition- metal surfaces		
20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) The electronic structure of 'coordinatively unsaturated' transition-metal complexes, in conjunction with the concept of orbital electronegativity, suggests how such complexes, along with low-coordination sites on transition- metal clusters and surfaces, can act as centers for the dissociation and reactivity of H <sub>2</sub> .		

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It is well known that certain "coordinatively unsaturated" transition-metal complexes in solution can homogeneously catalyze chemical reactions,<sup>1</sup> while it has long been suspected that low-coordination sites on transition-metal surfaces and supported transition-metal clusters are centers of heterogeneous reactivity.<sup>2,3</sup> In this communication, we wish to show that the electronic structure of such complexes, in conjunction with the concept of orbital electronegativity,<sup>4,5</sup> is consistent with their reactivity and is suggestive of how low-coordination sites on transition-metal surfaces can act as centers of reactivity. The dissociation and reactivity of  $H_2$  is considered as an illustrative example.

As our working model, we have chosen a Group-VIII transition-metal atom (M) dihedrally coordinated by ligands (L), yielding the coordinatively unsaturated  $L_2M$  complex illustrated at the top of Fig. 1. This model has the advantage that it can realistically represent transition-metal complexes of the type (e.g.,  $M = Pt, Ir, Rh$ ;  $L = Ph_3P =$  triphenylphosphine) which dissociatively bind and homogeneously catalyze reactions of  $H_2$ ,<sup>1</sup> and it can simulate low-coordination sites (e.g., "corner atoms") of faceted transition-metal clusters or stepped transition-metal surfaces which dissociatively chemisorb and heterogeneously catalyze reactions of  $H_2$ .<sup>2,3</sup> In the latter systems, the ligand (L) is also a metal atom, either of the same species as the transition metal (M), or of a different species in the case of an alloy surface or bimetallic cluster.

Molecular-orbital calculations have been carried out for  $L_2M$  and  $L_2MH_2$  complexes by the self-consistent-field X-alpha (SCF-X $\alpha$ ) method<sup>6</sup> as a function of metal species ( $M = Pt, Ir$ ), ligand species ( $L =$  phosphine, Pt), and molecular geometry. The resulting orbital energies for  $M = Pt$ ,  $L =$  phosphine, and geometry characteristic of the platinum-phosphine complexes described in



Ref. 1 are shown in Fig. 1. Also shown, for comparison, are the SCF-X $\alpha$  orbital energies for the isolated metal, ligand, and hydrogen molecule at the free-molecule internuclear distance 1.4 Å ( $H_2$ ) and internuclear distance 2.8 Å ( $H_2^*$ ) characteristic of the partially dissociated ("dihydride") configuration of  $H_2$  in the  $L_2MH_2$  complex.

The SCF-X $\alpha$  orbital energy eigenvalues shown in Fig. 1 can be rigorously identified with "orbital electronegativities" which are a measure of the relative average electron donor-acceptor character of the individual orbitals.<sup>4,5</sup> Thus the fact that the isolated ligand energy level, which corresponds to a phosphine "lone-pair" orbital, nearly coincides with the d-orbital energy level of the isolated Pt atom (neglecting relativistic shifts) implies a predominantly covalent L-Pt(5d) interaction similar to that expected for a direct Pt(5d)-Pt(5d) interaction. In this respect, the effect of coordinatively unsaturated phosphine ligands on the electronic structure of a platinum atom is expected to be similar to that of embedding a Pt atom in a low-coordination Pt environment, such as that provided by a surface or cluster.

The ligand-metal interaction in the  $L_2M$  complex leads to the bonding orbital energies labeled L-M( $d_{yz}$ ) and L-M( $d_{z^2}$ ) in Fig. 1, and to the antibonding orbital energies labeled M( $d_{z^2}$ )-L\*, M( $d_{yz}$ )-L\*, and M(s)-L\*, of which M( $d_{yz}$ )-L\* is the highest occupied energy level in the ground state of the complex. A simple interpretation of the position of the latter energy level is that the strong ligand-field repulsion of the metal d-orbital pointed on the ligand directions (the  $d_{yz}$  orbital for the chosen coordinate system) raises the energy level of this orbital, reduces the corresponding orbital electronegativity, and mixes in significant antibonding ligand character. The  $d_{z^2}$  orbital is also subject to some antibonding ligand-field

repulsion, whereas the  $d_{x^2-y^2}$ ,  $d_{xz}$ , and  $d_{xy}$  orbitals remain essentially nonbonding. When platinum atoms are substituted for the phosphine ligands, the electronic structure reduces to the manifold of bonding, nonbonding, and antibonding d-orbital energy levels (the "d-band") characteristic of a small platinum cluster.<sup>7</sup> In this case, the  $M(d_{yz})-L^*$  ( $L = M$ ) antibonding orbital may be interpreted as the analogue of a localized "surface state" which is split off from the top of the d-band.

The most important result of the strong ligand-metal antibonding component is to bring the  $M(d_{yz})-L^*$  orbital, the highest occupied orbital, closer in energy and electronegativity (as compared with the isolated Pt atom) to the empty antibonding  $\sigma_u$  orbital of the  $H_2$  molecule. This facilitates overlap and electron flow between the  $M(d_{yz})-L^*$  and  $\sigma_u$  orbitals, which are symmetry conserving,<sup>8</sup> thereby promoting dissociation of  $H_2$ . The partially dissociated molecule ( $H_2^*$ ), characterized by  $\sigma_g$  and  $\sigma_u$  orbital energies approaching the SCF- $X\alpha$  1s orbital energy of a free hydrogen atom (see Fig. 1),<sup>9</sup> can bind or "chemisorb" in a dihydride configuration to the coordinatively unsaturated metal site. This is revealed by the  $L_2MH_2$  molecular-orbital energies shown in Fig. 1 and the corresponding orbital wavefunction contour maps shown in Fig. 2. The  $2b_2$  orbital, for example, results from overlap and electron flow between the  $M(d_{yz})-L^*$  orbital and the  $H_2 \sigma_u$  orbital. The dihydride configuration is further stabilized by the "butterfly-like"  $1a_1$  and  $2a_1$  orbitals shown in Fig. 2, formed from the overlap of the equatorial parts of the  $L-M(d_{z^2})$  and  $M(d_{z^2})-L^*$  orbitals with the  $H(1s)$  (or  $H_2^* \sigma_g$ ) orbitals. Note that the  $M(d_{z^2})$  lobe pointed along the z-direction acts as a repulsive barrier which helps to keep the H atoms apart. These dihydride bonding orbitals are offset somewhat by the  $4a_1$  and  $3a_1$  orbitals resulting respectively from the antibonding interaction of the  $L-M(d_{z^2})$  and  $M(d_{x^2-y^2})$  orbitals with the  $H_2^* \sigma_g$  orbital, as is evident in the  $4a_1$  orbital contour map shown in Fig. 2. There is negligible

contribution of the M(s) orbital component in the binding of hydrogen to these platinum and iridium complexes. This is consistent with the finding, based on SCF- $\chi\alpha$  cluster calculations<sup>10</sup> and photoemission studies<sup>11</sup> that the metal d-orbitals are almost exclusively responsible for the chemisorption of hydrogen on second- and third-row transition metals such as palladium and platinum, whereas significant metal s,d-hybridization (with the s-orbital component dominant) is involved in hydrogen chemisorption on first-row transition metals such as nickel. Since the deuterium molecule ( $D_2$ ) is chemically identical to the hydrogen molecule ( $H_2$ ), all the results described above for the dissociation of  $H_2$  at a low-coordination transition-metal site apply equally well for the dissociation of  $D_2$  at such a site.

The above described electronic structure of the  $L_2MH_2$  (or  $L_2MD_2$ ) coordination complex leads to possible explanations of the observed homogeneous and heterogeneous catalytic reactivity of  $H_2$  (or  $D_2$ ). For example, the near cancellation of the contributions of the bonding ( $1a_1$ ,  $2a_1$ ) orbitals and antibonding ( $3a_1$ ,  $4a_1$ ) orbitals to metal-hydrogen bond strength, leaving the dissociative  $2b_2$  bonding orbital dominant, explains the relatively weak, reversible binding of  $H_2$  (or  $D_2$ ) to such complexes and their ability to activate  $H_2$ - $D_2$  exchange.<sup>1</sup> Since such a complex is also a good model for  $H_2$  (or  $D_2$ ) dissociation at the corner atoms of a platinum surface step, the results suggest why atomic steps on platinum surfaces are essential in dissociating  $H_2$  and  $D_2$  and in activating  $H_2$ - $D_2$  exchange.<sup>2</sup>

The electronic structure of the  $L_2MH_2$  complex also suggests a possible reaction path for the hydrogenation of unsaturated hydrocarbons at low-coordination transition-metal sites. The  $4a_1$  orbital, which defines the Fermi energy of the site, is closely matched in symmetry, energy, and electronegativity to the  $\pi$  orbitals of hydrocarbons such as acetylene ( $C_2H_2$ ) and



ethylene ( $C_2H_4$ ). When the  $4a_1$  orbital, which is an antibonding mixture of  $L-M(d_{z^2})$  and  $H_2^* \sigma_g$  orbital character, is only partially occupied (as is the case for  $M = Ir, Rh$ ), it offers a pathway for electron flow from a  $C_2H_2$  (or  $C_2H_4$ )  $\pi$  orbital to the dissociatively "chemisorbed" hydrogen. Electron flow directly between  $C_2H_2$  (or  $C_2H_4$ ) and  $H_2$  in the gas phase via the filled  $\pi$  and  $\sigma_g$  orbitals is forbidden by the Pauli exclusion principle, whereas electron flow directly between the  $\pi$  orbital and empty  $\sigma_u$  orbital is forbidden by orbital symmetry.<sup>8</sup> Because the  $4a_1$  orbital of  $L_2MH_2$  is antibonding between the  $L_2M$  site and  $H_2$ , while bonding between  $H_2$  and  $C_2H_2$  (or  $C_2H_4$ ), the net result of electron flow between a  $\pi$  orbital and the  $4a_1$  orbital is the breaking of a C-C  $\pi$  bond, the formation of two new C-H bonds, and the expulsion of the hydrogenated species  $C_2H_4$  (or  $C_2H_6$ ), as suggested by the reaction path shown in Fig. 3. Also shown is a contour map for the  $4a_1$  orbital of the  $L_2MH_2C_2H_2$  reaction intermediate (the third step of the proposed reaction path) formed as a result of the interaction of acetylene with the  $L_2MH_2$  complex. The incipient formation of C-H bonds via the overlap of the C-C  $\pi$  orbital with the antibonding metal-dihydride orbital and the resulting ethylene-like configuration are clearly visible in this map. It is important to note that the concerted reaction path indicated in Fig. 3 is not the conventional one for hydrogenation on ideal transition-metal surfaces, where it is usually assumed that chemisorption of acetylene or ethylene on one or two metal sites is the precursor to combining with hydrogen chemisorbed on neighboring sites. Nonconcerted reaction paths in which both reactants are coordinated to the same metal site are also possible and indeed have been argued to be favored kinetically in certain homogeneous reactions.<sup>12</sup> Alternative reaction paths at low-coordination transition-metal sites are currently under investigation in conjunction with theoretical studies of the reactivity of  $IrCl(CO)(Ph_3P)_2$  (Vaska's complex).<sup>13</sup>



In conclusion, we have attempted to show that a detailed theoretical study of the electronic structure of well characterized coordinatively unsaturated transition-metal complexes and their interactions with  $H_2$  can not only lead to an understanding of their homogeneous reactivity but can also serve as a model for the dissociative chemisorption and heterogeneous reactivity of  $H_2$  on low-coordination transition-metal surface sites, where definitive structural information is lacking. There are many useful analogies to be made between molecular transition-metal coordination complexes and surface-adsorbate interactions.<sup>14,15</sup> Such analogies are probably not fortuitous. They should be sought after and the common basis of understanding elucidated.

### References

\*Research sponsored by the Office of Naval Research and, in part, by the National Science Foundation through the Center for Materials Science and Engineering, M.I.T.

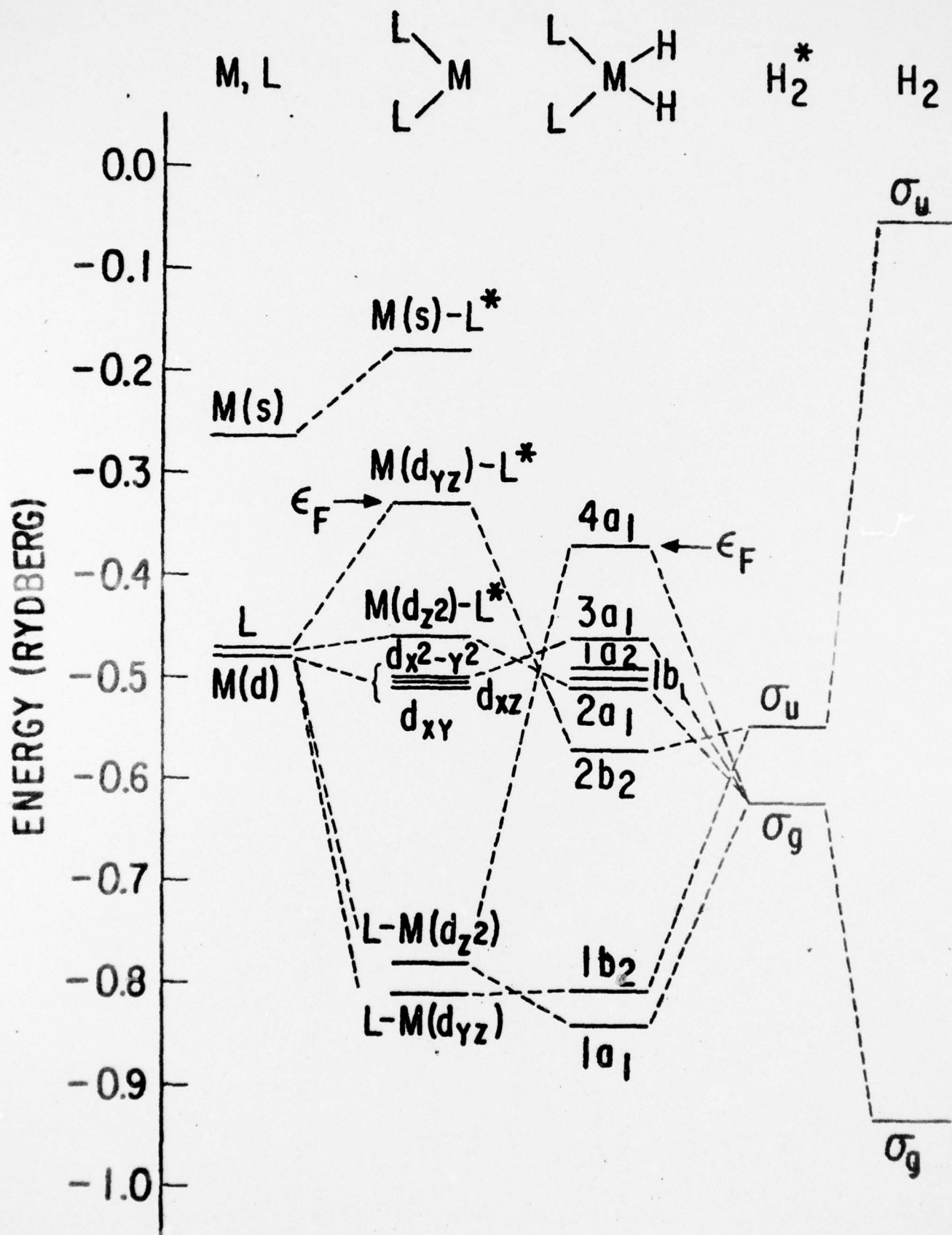
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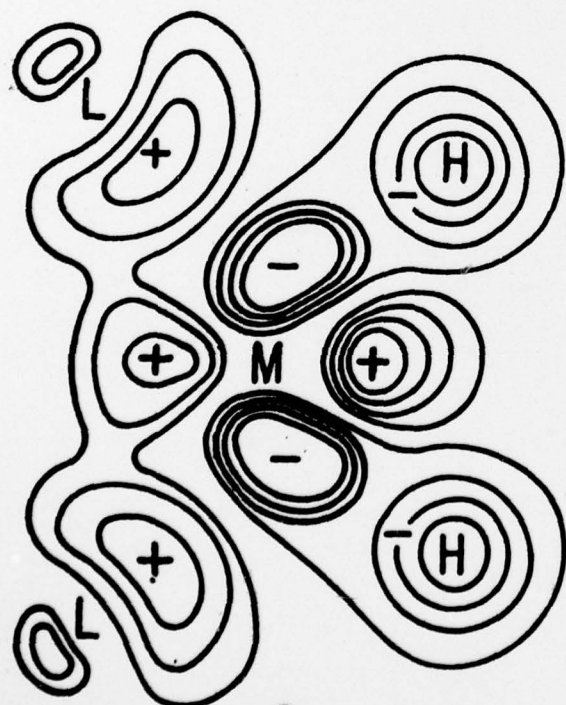
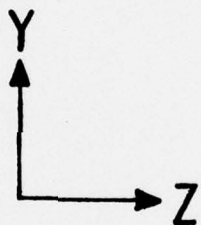
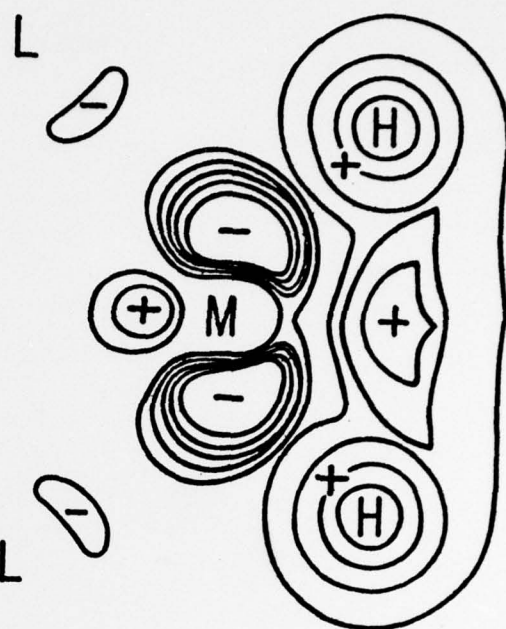
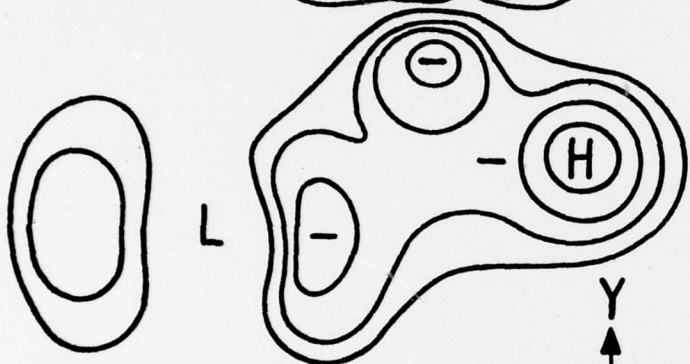
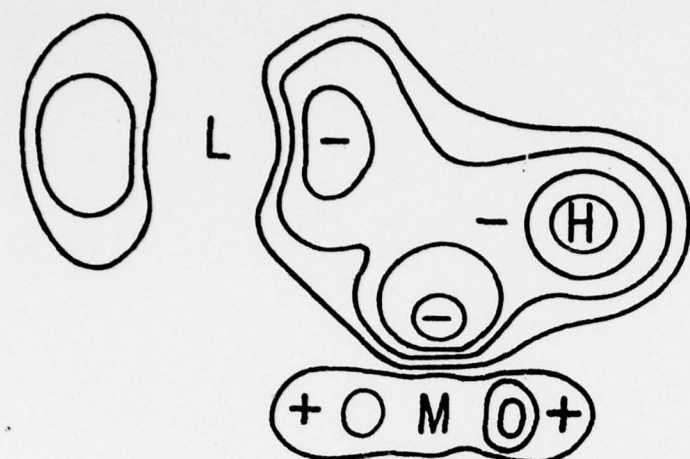
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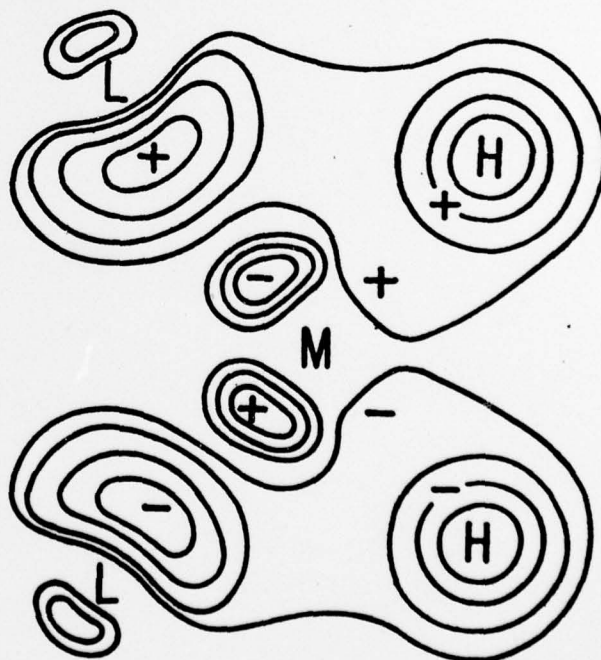
### Figure Captions

- Fig. 1. The SCF- $X\alpha$  orbital energies for coordinatively unsaturated transition-metal complexes representing low-coordination transition-metal sites and dissociative hydrogen chemisorption thereon. The  $L_2M$  energy levels are labeled according to their principal orbital character, whereas the  $L_2MH_2$  levels are labeled according to the irreducible representations of the  $C_{2v}$  symmetry group. The highest occupied orbital is indicated by the "Fermi level"  $\epsilon_F$ . The results shown are for  $M$  = platinum and  $L$  = phosphine, although they are qualitatively similar for other Group-VIII transition metals such as iridium. Also shown are the SCF- $X\alpha$  orbital energies for the isolated metal atom, ligand, and hydrogen molecule at the free-molecule internuclear distance 1.4 Å ( $H_2$ ) and internuclear distance 2.8 Å ( $H_2^*$ ) characteristic of the dihydride configuration in the  $L_2MH_2$  complex. The unimportant nonbonding phosphine ligand orbitals are not shown.
- Fig. 2. Contour maps of the principal bonding and antibonding molecular-orbital wavefunctions corresponding to the orbital energies of the  $L_2MH_2$  complex shown in Fig. 1. Regions of differing sign are separated by nodes. The high-density contours and inner nodes corresponding to the atomic core electrons are not shown.
- Fig. 3. Possible reaction path for the hydrogenation of acetylene at a coordinatively unsaturated transition-metal site. Also shown is a contour map for the  $4a_1$  orbital wavefunction of the  $L_2MH_2C_2H_2$  reaction intermediate (the third step of the reaction path) formed as a result of the interaction of acetylene with the  $L_2MH_2$  complex. The results shown are for  $M$  = iridium and  $L$  = phosphine.





$2a_1$



$2b_2$



